



EPA Cleanup Targets Former Lead Smelter

Calumet Lead Site

Chicago, Illinois

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For more information

For questions, comments or more information about the Lake Calumet Lead removal project, contact these EPA team members:

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is conducting a cleanup project at the former Calumet Lead smelter to remove dangerous lead and other pollutants scattered around the 6-acre site on Chicago's South Side. In EPA terms, the cleanup on the abandoned property is called a "time-critical removal action" because the pollutants pose an imminent health threat for people who are exposed to the property or who track pollutants off the site. A fence surrounds the location but numerous gaps allow easy access to the grounds. EPA is conducting the removal action under the authority from federal law.

Cleanup goal

EPA responders found dangerous levels of hazardous lead, arsenic and cadmium. Hazardous substances were found on the floor of the razed main building, in the soil and throughout debris piles located around the site.

The overall goal of the removal action that started in mid-October is to prevent direct contact and off-site movement of contaminated soil from the Calumet Lead site. This goal will be accomplished by removing highly contaminated surface soil to a depth of two feet and backfilling with clean earthen materials. These actions will provide a protective cover to prevent direct contact and movement by the contaminated soil from the former smelter property.

In preparation for excavating contaminated soil, cleanup crews removed brush and consolidated debris. EPA officials also looked for a company that could dispose of a large slag pile located on the southwest corner of the property.

Upon completion of the removal action, officials will likely place a deed restriction on the property because contamination beyond two-feet deep will still be present and limit future use of the site.

Site history

The Calumet Lead site is at 11901 S. Champlain Ave., Chicago. The site is located at the southern end of the city, 3,000 feet south of E. 115th Street and near I-94.

According to a 1936-1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, the former facility consisted of a two story main building with two, one-story rooms attached to the south and a one-level storage room attached to the west. At some point between the late 1950s to late 1960s, Calumet Lead ceased doing business, and the structures, except for a partial smokestack, were razed. The property was abandoned, and EPA investigators could not find an owner, so the cleanup is being done with taxpayer funds.